Criticism in Need of Clarification

van Laar, Jan Albert

Published in:
Argumentation

DOI:
10.1007/s10503-013-9309-8

Publication date:
2014

Argumentation
DOI 10.1007/s10503-013-9309-8

Criticism in Need of Clarification

Jan Albert van Laar

Abstract It furthers the dialectic when the opponent is clear about what motivates and underlies her critical stance, even if she does not adopt an opposite standpoint, but merely doubts the proponent's opinion. Thus, there is some kind of *burden of criticism*. In some situations, there should an obligation for the opponent to offer explanatory counterconsiderations, if requested, whereas in others, there is no real dialectical obligation, but a mere responsibility for the opponent to cooperate by providing her motivations for being critical. In this paper, it will be shown how a set of dialogue rules may encourage an opponent, in this latter type of situation, to provide her counterconsiderations, and to do so at an appropriate level of specificity. Special attention will be paid to the desired level of specificity. For example, the critic may challenge a thesis by saying "Why? Says who?," without conveying whether she could be convinced by an argument from expert opinion, or from position to know, or from popular opinion. What are fair dialogue rules for dealing with less than fully specific criticism?

Keywords Ambiguity · Argumentation scheme · Burden of criticism · Challenge · Dialogue rule · Presumption · Request for argument · Specificity

1 Introduction

According to the dialogical approach to argumentation, arguments are inextricably bound up with critical dialogue, so that in order to grasp the nature of argumentation, as well as the norms with which to evaluate arguments, we should have a clear grasp of the nature of critical reactions, as well as the norms that govern criticisms. This paper assumes (also defended in van Laar and Krabbe 2013) that an opponent (also: critic, or antagonist of an opinion) has a responsibility, and sometimes even a dialogical obligation to provide the

J. A. van Laar (✉)
University of Groningen, Oude Boteringestraat 52, 9712 GL Groningen, The Netherlands
e-mail: j.a.van.laar@rug.nl

Published online: 11 January 2014

proponent (also: arguer, or protagonist of an opinion) with a counterconsideration that explains her critical stance. An argumentative dialogue improves when the opponent, spontaneously or on request, explains her motivations for being critical, and thereby provides the proponent with some strategic advice about how to convince her. For example, in addition to a mere challenge, "Why would you think it's going to rain?" the opponent might add a counterconsideration, "As far as I know, no weatherman forecasted rain," that both explains to the proponent what underlies her critical stance and provides him with a suggestion about how to convince her, yet that does not constitute an opposite thesis in need of defence.

In this paper, I expand on this normative theory by examining the required level of specificity of counterconsiderations, a topic that was only briefly touched upon in van Laar and Krabbe (2013). The question to be answered is: How can an opponent be encouraged to explain to the proponent what underlies her critical stance, whether or not she is under a real dialectical obligation to do so, and to what level of detail should the opponent specify, or disambiguate, or elaborate on her critical stance by means of such counterconsiderations? Sometimes, a counterconsideration does provide the proponent with some information about what underlies the opponent's critical stance, but not enough to choose an appropriate argumentative strategy that might satisfy the opponent's needs. What set of fair dialogue rules would enable the proponent to urge the opponent to specify her critical attitude further, without making it too difficult for an opponent who has no special expertise on the topic at hand, or lacks other resources that enable her to be sufficiently precise about her critical position? A number of dialogue rules will be proposed that can be implemented within a more or less formalized model of dialogue.

In Sect. 2, I will emphasize the importance of criticism for understanding argumentation by distinguishing between three ways in which criticism directs the development of argumentation. In Sects. 3 and 4, I will deal with the conceptualization of the various types of criticism (based on Krabbe and van Laar 2011) and with the norms for raising criticism (based on van Laar and Krabbe 2013). I will discuss how this theory can be expanded, firstly by examining how a critical reaction can be more or less specific, and thereby less or more in need of (further) clarification, in Sect. 5; secondly by proposing dialogue norms that enable the participants to deal with less than fully specific criticisms, in Sect. 6; and thirdly by examining some connections with the dialogical theory of ambiguity, in Sect. 7.

2 The Impact of Criticism

According to my dialogical perspective on argumentation, an argument is an attempt to answer criticism of a particular position by offering reasonable grounds (for comparable views, see van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004; Finocchiaro 1980[1];

[1] Note that in a later paper, Finocchiaro characterizes conceptions of "argument" as replies to objections, as "hyper-dialectical" (2005, pp. 299–300), and he abandons such conceptions in favour of a "moderately dialectical conception" that *also* allows for arguments that "attempt to justify a conclusion by giving reasons in support of it," and that do not (only) defend this conclusion from objections (p. 319).

Krabbe 2007[2]). For example, within pragma-dialectical theory, argumentation is an attempt to persuade an antagonist who, within the framework of a critical discussion, probes and assesses the protagonist's standpoint and his arguments (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004). Within the formal dialectical theories that have their roots in Hamblin's *Fallacies* (1970), such as the model for *permissive persuasion dialogue* (Walton and Krabbe 1995), a proponent of a thesis tries to answer all challenges in such a way that the result is a sequence of reasoning that starts from propositions that the opponent is willing to commit herself to, and that results in the proponent's conclusion.

Given that the proponent's argumentation is for a large part the result of the opponent's decisions, the opponent should not be a passive recipient of the proponent's attempts to build his opinion on unshakable grounds. In existing normative dialogue theories, the opponent's discretionary power becomes apparent in her right to make three types of decisions. Before listing these, I will expound on a typical, though highly simplified normative model of critical discussion, to establish a point of departure for discussing the functions of criticism, as well as for proposing dialogue norms with which to answer the question of the current paper.

The model is dubbed "basic critical discussion," and it includes only some essential features of the four stages of the normative model of a critical discussion, as developed by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004).[3] At the *confrontation stage*, both participants express their non-mixed difference of opinion. This paper restricts itself to discussions that start from such a non-mixed difference of opinion, and it also does not take into account discussions that start from a non-mixed difference and that develop into a mixed dispute as a result of the opponent adopting, at some later point, an opposite standpoint of her own. At the *opening stage*, the opponent determines her initial concessions. These concessions are her propositional commitments, although without having a burden of proof for them (cf. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst on the starting points of a critical discussion).

The common goal of the participants is to determine whether they can resolve their difference of opinion, and if so, in whose favour. The examination of this issue takes place within the next stage, the *argumentation stage*, where the participants exchange arguments and criticisms. At this stage, the participants distribute tasks, according to a dialectical division of labour.[4]

According to this division of labour, the individual aim of the proponent is to show to the opponent that her critical attitude towards his opinion is inconsistent, or otherwise untenable. His strategy is to develop a configuration of reasoning that starts from the opponent's concessions and that results in his standpoint. Such a configuration of reasoning, used for persuasive purposes, is what I call *argumentation*.

[2] Krabbe denies that his view is "hyper-dialectical" (see the previous note), for the reason that critical reactions also include, in addition to "objections," pure challenges (and also other types of critical reactions).

[3] With this model (van Laar 2007), a complex argument in which an arguer anticipates critical reactions, can be analysed as an arrangement of basic critical discussions, in which the arguer makes moves for the opponent, while having primary responsibility for the tasks of the proponent.

[4] Rescher refers to this division of labour as a *probative asymmetry* (1977, pp. 17–18).

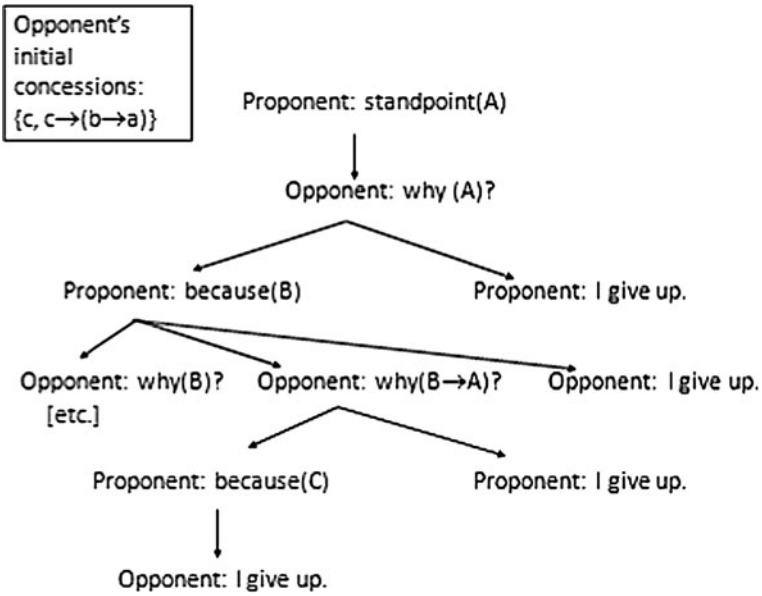

Fig. 1 A profile of dialogue, showing a number of possible dialogues in accordance with the model of *basic critical discussion*

The individual aim of the opponent is to explain to the proponent that her critical position is tenable, or otherwise consistent. Her strategy is to raise critical questions, and other types of criticism, in an attempt to show how she can resist the proponent's standpoint consistently, notwithstanding her initial concessions. Again, in this particular model the opponent does not defend a thesis of her own, and so she cannot advance real counterargumentation, and the dispute remains non-mixed.

According to the dialogue rules that underlie the sample dialogues in Fig. 1, the dialogue starts with the proponent's standpoint, "A," and the opponent's challenge to it. After this confrontation, the proponent at each turn either provides an argument in favour of a challenged proposition, or he gives up. The opponent at each subsequent turn either challenges the regular premise of the proponent's last argument ("B," in the proponent's argument at the third stage), or she challenges the connection premise, which is the conditional statement that expresses the argumentative connection between the regular premise and the proposition it supports ("If B then A," in the proponent's argument at the third stage),[5] or the opponent gives up. Note that a move in the form of "Why (φ)?" throughout this paper is understood as a request for an argument and not a request for explanation. A separate locution will be introduced for requests for explanation below. The move of giving up concludes the dialogue, and constitutes its final, *concluding stage*. One essential rule for the argumentation stage is that the opponent is not allowed to

[5] The reason to assume that there is a separate connection premise is that the opponent can make into a point of contention the specific argumentative connection between the argument's premises and its conclusion.

challenge a statement that is in her set of initial concessions. In other words, these concessions can function as the proper points of departure of the argumentation that the proponent develops stepwise in reply to the critical reactions. Consequently, in the dialogue where the proponent argued in favour of "B → A" with "because(C)," the opponent cannot but give up, given her set of initial concessions. Below, we will discuss presumptions, which are dealt with as a special kind of concession that can be retracted, albeit at a cost.

In this kind of framework, the opponent influences the development of the proponent's argumentation in two ways. Later in this paper, we will discuss a third way which should be added to the opponent's inventory.

First, the opponent decides what propositions to concede, and thereby determines what propositions the proponent can use as the starting points of his defence. This can be done, as in a basic critical discussion, at the opening stage, which is seen here as a preliminary stage, not covered by the dialogue rules (in more advanced models the opponent may also concede propositions in the course of the argumentative exchange). In order to enable the proponent to make a serious attempt to realize his individual aim of persuading the opponent, there should be a responsibility on the opponent's part to be completely clear about the substance of her commitments. Otherwise, the proponent does not stand a chance at developing an interesting, high quality, *ex concessis* argumentation. Of course, this also implies an obligation to phrase concessions in a sufficiently clear and unambiguous manner.

Second, the opponent decides what parts of the proponent's standpoint to criticize, as well as what premises to put to the test. Note that she can also challenge reasons that have been left implicit, such as connection premises in our model. To use Searle's term in a somewhat different way, all critical reactions are *directive* (Searle 1979), in the sense that they direct the proponent to make particular choices. With her critical reactions, the opponent actively steers the course of the dialogue, and thereby the structure and substance of the proponent's argumentation, if the proponent is receptive to the opponent's demands.

In an enriched model, the outlines of which have been proposed by van Laar and Krabbe (2013), the opponent has a third device for directing the course of the proponent's argumentation. According to that proposal, the opponent decides whether to inform the proponent about what she considers wrong in his argument, and thereby reveal something about the kind of argumentation that she would consider convincing. And if she does so, she also decides with what counterconsideration she informs the proponent about it. Consequently, even in a non-mixed discussion, the opponent may put forward reasoning, not for persuasive purposes, but for the explanatory purpose of informing the proponent about her motivations for being critical. It is the proponent who discharges a *burden of proof*, and the opponent who, in trying to explain what her critical position amounts to, tries to discharge a rather different *burden of criticism*.

3 The Ways of Criticism

Criticism, as understood here, is a speech act, or complex of speech acts, with which a participant either puts forward a negative evaluation of an argumentative

contribution by her interlocutor, or at least alludes to such a negative evaluation by making it clear that if the interlocutor will not respond satisfactorily to the criticism, a negative evaluation will be forthcoming (Krabbe and van Laar 2011). Pointing out a flaw—"that's false!"—is of the former kind of criticism, whereas a simple challenge is of the latter kind—"Why A? I'm not convinced yet; Can you give me an argument?"A particular type of critical reaction can be characterized by specifying each of four parameters: the *focus* of a critical reaction, the *norm* appealed to in a critical reaction, the *level* at which a critical reaction is put forward, and the illocutionary *force* of a critical reaction (Krabbe and van Laar 2011).[6] A criticism could be insufficiently clear with respect to each of these four aspects, and I shall indicate some of these types of lack of clarity. A more in-depth treatment of the level of specificity of explanatory counterconsiderations, which is the central issue of this paper, will be postponed until Sect. 5.

3.1 Focus

A critical reaction concerns a contribution by the interlocutor, and the propositional *focus*[7] of a critical reaction specifies what exactly the criticism is about. For example, if the focus is on the main standpoint, for instance "It is going to rain," or on a regular reason, for instance "weatherman Erwin says so," the criticism is called *tenability criticism* (Krabbe and van Laar 2011; cf. Krabbe 2007): "Why should we think it's going to rain?" or if the reason has been given, "Why should I accept that Erwin made this very forecast?" Alternatively, the focus can be on the connection between a regular reason and the standpoint supported, called *connection criticism* (Krabbe 2007): "Why should we accept it is going to rain, if weatherman Erwin says so?"[8]

The opponent may also focus on the argumentation scheme that underlies the proponent's argument. In addition to raising a connection criticism, with which the opponent challenges the specific connection between these particular premises and

[6] The background of this fourfold distinction is the notion of a critical reaction: as a particular speech act or complex of speech acts, a critical reaction has a particular illocutionary *force*; as an (allusion to an) evaluation it is about something that constitutes its *focus*; as an evaluation it appeals to a *norm*; and as itself a contribution to a discussion it either contributes to the ground *level* of dialogue, or it comments on a dialogue at a *metalevel* of dialogue.

[7] In addition to, or instead of having a propositional focus, a critical reaction can focus: (a) on the locution used by the other side, for instance by pointing out an ambiguous expression; (b) or on the situation in which the interlocutor's contribution is put forward, for instance by alleging that this kind of move ("Our economy is not going to recover in the next few years.") is in inappropriate within the circumstances (the speaker being the prime minister); (c) or on the person addressed, for instance by alleging that she has a financial bias and cannot be trusted on this issue (van Laar and Krabbe 2013). I restrict my attention in this paper to the propositional focus of criticism.

[8] Note that this request could be answered in at least two ways by the proponent. First, he may support it by, for example, stating a generalization of the connection premise: "If an expert in a field says A then, generally, A," which amounts to a statement to the effect that the underlying argumentation scheme is sufficiently reliable. Second, he can strengthen the connection between the earlier adduced premises and the conclusion by giving an additional reason, hoping that the new connection premise, with an antecedent made up of the conjunction of the old reasons and the new one, *is* acceptable to the opponent: "Not only does weatherman Erwin say so, but you can also see the air-pressure dropping, which indicates rain."

this particular conclusion, without focusing on anything more general than that, the opponent may also choose to challenge the underlying argumentation scheme, with, what I refer to as, a *scheme criticism*: "Why should I accept A, because some expert or other says so?" (this notion was introduced in van Laar 2012). In the latter case, the opponent requests argumentation in favour of the acceptability and *prima facie* trustworthiness of the argumentation scheme focused on *as such*.[9]

A critical reaction may have an unclear focus and be in need of clarification on that account. A critical reaction "Why so?", in response to an argument "A so B" may, within a particular situation, be both interpreted as *tenability criticism,* and as *connection criticism*. Moreover, the critical reaction "What do you mean?" in response to a standpoint *A* may, dependent upon context, express a request for further argumentation, but it might also be meant more literally as a request for linguistic clarification. As with similar kinds of unclearness, if these specific readings play a role in the dialogue, either because the proponent needs to know in more detail what the critical reaction amounts to in order to respond adequately, or because the proponent misinterprets the focus of a critical reaction as intended by the opponent, then the criticism can be seen as—what I call—*actively ambiguous* (see also Sect. 7).

3.2 Norm

A critical reaction evaluates, or at least prepares for an evaluation, and the *norm* appealed to specifies from what normative perspective the—possibly prospective—evaluation takes place. First, the critic may appeal to a *rule for critical discussion*. For example, a critical reaction may appeal to the obligation-to-defend rule, simply by posing a request for argumentation, so that it becomes clear to the proponent that if he does not respond with an argument, the opponent will remain unconvinced. Second, a critic may appeal to an *optimality norm*, a norm that distinguishes between non-fallacious moves of higher and of lower quality. For example, an argument may be judged as non-persuasive, flawed or even blundering: "If you want to convince me, I need more than just some anecdotes." Or it may be alleged that a more interesting argument is available: "I would have expected you to make reference to the rather firm results of professor X!" By appealing to norms of optimality, a critic can direct the interlocutor to act as a serious discussant who genuinely aims to develop the strongest possible case for his position. Third, the critic may appeal to an *institutional norm*, a norm that governs a particular argumentative activity type (cf. Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2005). For example, in court, the evidence may be objected to as "inadmissible" for having been obtained by unacceptable methods, regardless of its non-judicial persuasiveness. In many types of conversation, politeness can be seen as an "institutional" requirement, and some opinions, then, can be successfully charged as being offensive.

[9] As became clear from note 7, a challenge to the connection premise may lead, but does not force the proponent to assert the reliability of the argumentation scheme. The only preferred response to scheme criticism, however, is a defence of the argumentation scheme.

However, the critical reaction may be imprecise in this respect, so that the receiver has to reckon with more than one reading. For example, the critic's "You can't say this" might both appeal to: (1) the obligation-to-defend rule, on the ground that what is said apparently cannot be proven; (2) some optimality rule, on the ground that it is weak and unconvincing; (3) or to an institutional rule, on the ground that it, apparently, is situationally inappropriate.

3.3 Level

A critical reaction contributes more or less directly to the step-wise construction or destruction of the argumentation of the proponent. If it satisfies the criterion of doing so in quite a direct way, then the critical reaction can be seen as part of the *ground level dialogue*. For example, a challenge "Why A?" quite directly contributes to the construction of the proponent's argumentation, by inviting him to add an argument in favour of *A*. However, the critical reaction may also be much more indirectly relevant to the proponent's argumentation, by dealing primarily with the course of the dialogue, rather than with the topic at hand. In such cases, the critical reaction can be said to initiate, or continue, a *metalevel dialogue*, which is a dialogue about a dialogue. A fallacy charge (i.e., a charge that the other side has violated a rule for critical discussion) is a prime example of starting a metadialogue (Krabbe 2003, p. 643). Yet, by the above criterion, I am inclined also to characterize discussions on strategic issues as metadialogical, for example when the opponent criticizes an argument as needlessly weak, or even as a blunder. Furthermore, a violation of an institutional rule may be labelled as a *fault,* and charging one's interlocutor with a fault can be seen as an indirectly relevant to the construction or destruction of the proponent's argumentation, and thus as a metalevel contribution. Finally, dialogues that are to be located at the opening stage, such as those about whether or not to accept some argumentation scheme, can be seen as taking place at a metalevel of dialogue (Krabbe 2003, p. 642). Thus, scheme criticism can be seen as a metadialogical kind of criticism.[10]

A critical reaction may be unclear as to whether it aims at contributing to the continuation of the ground level dialogue, or whether it aspires at a metadialogue. An unspecified critical reaction such as "that's too stupid" could both be taken as a rough way of challenging a statement, but also as a way of pointing out a weakness in the proponent's strategy. Similarly, responding to an argument by saying something to the effect that "This is improper" may, by lack of specification of the kind of norm appealed to, constitute a charge of fallacy, or a charge of fault.

[10] However, if a connection premise—such as "It is going to rain, if weatherman Erwin says so"—has been supported by a generalization to the effect that "If an expert in a field says A then, generally, A (see note 7), then that general proposition has become a proper part of the proponent's argumentation, and a challenge to that statement by the opponent does not amount to the start of a metalevel dialogue. For in that case, the general proposition, including a possible defence of it, is part of the proponent's argumentative structure, whereas if he supports a challenged argumentation scheme, the proponent is contributing to the opening stage of the discussion.

3.4 Force

Finally, a critical reaction is an instance of a particular type of speech act, and exhibits a particular illocutionary force, or it forms a complex of such speech acts (Searle 1979). A critical reaction can be a directive, such as a request for clarification, or a request for an argument—which I refer to as a *challenge*. Or the critical reaction can be an assertive, when denying a statement by the interlocutor, or when pointing out some flaw, fallacy or fault in the interlocutor's contribution.

A critical reaction may be unclear by leaving the interlocutor with more than one option when having to decide about how to understand the illocutionary force of the critical response, and thereby about how to respond to it. For one, a response such as "No!" may be expressive of a denial, but the context might leave open the option that it expresses a mere request for an argument for *A*.

Special mention must be made of a critical reaction that is complex because it contains reasoning. Reasoning constitutes argumentation, as I use the term, only if it serves a persuasive purpose. In the case of counterargumentation, the opponent tries to reason from what her interlocutor is or should be prepared to concede towards a thesis of her own, and thereby she becomes a second proponent. For example, she may defend the denial of his standpoint. However, the critical reaction may also contain reasoning that serves an explanatory purpose only. In that case, the opponent offers reasons in order to show to the proponent what motivates or underlies her critical stance. In such a situation, the reasoning does not constitute argumentation, for it does not claim to start from the other side's (the proponent's) concessions, and nor does it aim at persuasion. A reason put forward in such an explanation of a critical stance is equivalent to what we earlier have referred to as an explanatory "counterconsideration." Norms for introducing counterconsiderations are the subject of Sect. 4 below, while Sects. 5 and 6 will deal with the required level of specificity of such counterconsiderations.

4 The Burden of Criticism

Suppose that, in support of his standpoint that we ought to cancel our hike, the proponent offers the argument that it is going to rain, and that the opponent offers tenability criticism, requesting argumentation in support of the proponent's weather forecast. In such a situation, the proponent has a burden of proof. However, before discharging his burden of proof, he may first want to obtain information about what motivates the opponent not to accept his reason, so as to enable himself to devise an argument that stands a serious chance of convincing this particular opponent. Thus, rather than giving a reason in support of the weather forecast, the proponent first puts forward a request for explanation: "Please, explain why you do not accept that it is going to rain next week?" I will code this request as "Explain (Why A?)." (see van Laar and Krabbe 2013, on the theory put forward in this section.[11])

[11] This theory also examines dialogue norms that govern two other kinds of countercriticism on the proponent's part: First, the countercriticism whereby the proponent requests the opponent to argue in favour of the denial of his assertion, "Why not-A?"; Second, the countercriticism whereby the proponent requests the opponent to argue in favour of the appropriateness of challenging his assertion, "Why (Why A?)?" In the current paper, I deal only with the dialectic resulting from a third kind of countercriticism, whereby the proponent requests the opponent to explain her criticism of A.

If the opponent provides such an explanation, she does so by expressing a proposition that constitutes a counterconsideration, coded as "Counter C". In the example, the counterconsideration is the proposition: "No weatherman says that it is going to rain next week." This counterconsideration can be presented to the proponent in two different modes,[12] and each of these modes can be considered to be expressive of the very same messages.

Mode A: When offering a counterconsideration, an opponent may stress the aim of showing the tenability of her critical position: "As far as you've shown, the weathermen didn't say so." It is important to note that the opponent does not really assert that there is no weatherman who has forecast rain, at least not in the sense that she incurs a burden of proof for this proposition. Rescher introduced the notion of a "cautious assertion," which clarifies the typical illocutionary force of a counterconsideration. According to Rescher, the cautious assertion of a proposition P, indicated by †P, stands for: "P is the case for all that you (the adversary) have shown" or "P's being the case is compatible with everything you've said (i.e., have maintained or conceded)" (Rescher 1977, p. 6). Consequently, it is possible for the opponent to raise a critical reaction that is highly informative to the proponent by conveying her motives for being critical and thereby giving him strategic advice, without, however, becoming strongly committed to these propositions. Because an opponent can discharge her burden of criticism without advancing *ex concessis* argumentation,[13] by advancing cautiously asserted counterconsiderations, a burden of criticism is substantially different from a burden of proof.

Mode B: The same message, however, could be expressed more modestly, "How about the weathermen? What do they say about it?", in which case the opponent, as it were, provides the proponent with strategic advice, stressing the latter's individual aim of persuasion. The implicit advice to the proponent, then, is: (1) to refute the counterconsideration by saying something to the effect that "This weatherman did make this very forecast;" (2) to refute it by stating that his forecast stands, even if no weatherman were to vouch for it; or (3) to refute it by making it plausible that the possibility in which no weatherman vouched for it is so far-fetched as to make for an inadmissible counterconsideration that need not be taken into account. However, the advice is also conveyed when presenting her counterconsideration in Mode A, and the strategic advice when presenting it in Mode B.

What set of norms of critical discussion should govern counterconsiderations, according to this theory? First, the opponent has a responsibility to make her contributions more than minimally directive, because the quality of the dialogue improves if the opponent, in addition to raising a mere challenge, also offers a counterconsideration, so that the probability of a qualitatively good argumentative response by the proponent increases. Nevertheless, in many situations, this responsibility should not lead to a real obligation on the opponent's part, because

[12] Note that I disregard a third way, to wit the presentation of a counterconsideration in counterargumentation. I do so in order to limit my account to dialogues that are and remain non-mixed, and fully asymmetrical.

[13] If only she refrains from wrapping her explanatory counterconsiderations in counterargumentation.

there should be a right for an opponent to challenge standpoints in situations where she simply lacks the knowledge or creativity to explain her motives and doubts.

Second, in some situations this responsibility of the opponent becomes a genuine obligation to provide a counterconsideration, depending upon the relationship between the proposition challenged by the opponent and her commitment store. Krabbe (2001) distinguished between four such relationships. First, a proposition may not be a commitment on the opponent's part at all, for never having been conceded, or for having been retracted after having been conceded at an earlier stage. Second, a proposition counts as a *fixed concession* by an opponent, if it has been determined in the opening stage that it cannot be retracted throughout the dialogue, for example because the participants consider it to be crucial to the kind of dialogue they want to have. An example could be provided by basic knowledge in a particular discipline, such as the theorems of the Modern Synthesis in evolutionary biology, that provide the starting points for a specific dialogue on how to explain a special feature of a particular bird. Given that a challenge to a proposition to which one is committed can be seen as implying the retraction of it, fixed concessions cannot be challenged. Third, a proposition counts as a free concession if the proponent is free to retract her commitment to it, but as long as she does not do so, the proponent can use it to make his case. For example, such a free concession can have been incurred simply by not criticizing a particular assertion by the proponent, so that the proponent may assume that he can use the thus conceded proposition ("silence means assent") for as long as the opponent does not withdraw this commitment.

Fourth, and finally, a proposition counts as a *presumption* if it is a commitment that can be retracted by the opponent, but only in return for incurring the obligation to account for this retraction, if the proponent requests so. For example, in many settings, propositions are accepted for practical purposes, such as when we assume weathermen to be sober, so as to be able to decide whether or not to take an umbrella when going out. Or, by taking part in special institutional activities, one incurs special presumptions, such as a vicar on his pulpit who is presumed to accept the existence of God, or a biologist who is presumed to accept that all life is in part made up from phosphorus, or a sceptical philosopher who when entering the gym is assumed to accept that he has a physical body (as well as a mind; cf. Rescorla 2009). Of special interest are presumptions incurred by having accepted a defeasible argumentation scheme as *prima facie* correct. Suppose that the opponent accepts, as *prima facie* correct, a particular argumentation scheme. Then, if the proponent advances an argument that clearly instantiates that abstract pattern of argumentation, the opponent on the one hand has some kind of commitment to the argumentative connection between the argument's premises and its conclusion. On the other hand, given the argumentation scheme's defeasible nature, this argumentative connection should not be immune from criticism on the opponent's part. The solution is to conceive of this connection as a conditional proposition such that it counts as a presumption of the opponent, so that she is allowed to challenge and withdraw it, albeit at the expense of being accountable for it. In the next section, a norm will be formulated that implements this normative proposal.

Because fixed concessions are not allowed to be challenged and free concessions can be challenged at no real cost, we should focus on presumption as the kind of commitment on the opponent's part that, if challenged, brings further obligations. The opponent is accountable for having challenged a presumption in at least two ways: the proponent may request her to argue in favour of the appropriateness of thus retracting her commitment, or he may request her to explain her challenge. In this paper, I deal only with the second option. Thus, if *A* is a presumption (which may be a conditional proposition expressing the correctness of an argumentative connection), and the proponent requests the opponent to explain her challenge to *A*, the opponent must offer a counterconsideration.

5 Requests for Argumentation, at Different Levels of Specificity

In this section, I will deal with the most basic type of critical reaction: the challenge. With a challenge, the opponent focuses on the propositional content of the proponent's standpoint, or on one the reasons used in the proponent's argument, or on its connection premise, thereby appealing to the obligation-to-defend rule at the ground level of dialogue. Following the pragma-dialectical theory, we can characterize its illocutionary force as that of a request, in this case a request for an argument. Argumentative dialogue is to a limited degree competitive, and in order to emphasize the game-like nature of critical discussion, one might legitimately refer to these requests as *tests*, *challenges* or even as *attacks*. However, even if the focus of the attack, challenge, test or request has been made fully explicit by the opponent, so that the proponent knows what proposition(s) to defend, the criticism may lack specificity by refraining from making fully explicit what response would answer the criticism satisfactorily: What would count as a test passed? What as a challenge met? What as a successful defence against the attack? What kind of argument, exactly, has been requested?

In this paper, I will further restrict myself to situations where the opponent specifies her critical stance by informing the proponent about what *kind* of argument might turn out to be convincing to her. I will deal with argumentation schemes from a normative perspective, before returning to the issue of specificity.

An *argumentation scheme* is a scheme for deductive or defeasible reasoning, containing a number of variables. Below, I list four examples of defeasible argumentation schemes, taken from Walton et al. (2008), albeit simplified and adjusted to the purpose of this paper:

- The argumentation scheme From Expert Opinion: "Expert E says that A. Therefore A."
- The argumentation scheme From Popular Opinion: "Almost everybody says that A. Therefore A."
- The argumentation scheme From Position to Know: "Person P is in a position to know A and says that A. Therefore A."
- The argumentation scheme From Consequences: "Action A has positive consequences. Therefore we should do A."

Suppose the proponent argues as follows: "Weatherman Erwin says that it's going to rain, therefore it is going to rain." Then the proponent has quite clearly argued in accordance with the argumentation scheme From Expert Opinion. Of course, an opponent should not be forced to accept the *prima facie* acceptability of this argumentation scheme. However, the opponent may decide that in the current situation, she can accept this argumentation scheme, or a version of it, as appropriate. Moreover, if she does, she cannot without further ado challenge the connection premise of the proponent's argument, that is, the conditional statement that has the argument's conclusion as its consequent and the conjunction of the argument's premises as its antecedent: "If weatherman Erwin says that it's going to rain, then it is going to rain." The current proposal (van Laar 2011; van Laar and Krabbe 2013) is to conceive of the connection premise of an argument that instantiates an accepted argumentation scheme as a presumption. In other words, the opponent is allowed to challenge it, thereby withdrawing her commitment to it, but at the cost of being accountable for it, which—among other things—means that she must be prepared to explain her challenge if the proponent requests so. We can formulate this rule as, what will be referred to as, *The Binding Norm*.

> *The Binding Norm*: If the opponent has adopted an argumentation scheme as *prima facie* acceptable, and the proponent offers an argument that clearly instantiates that scheme, the connection premise of that argument counts as a presumption of the opponent.

Consequently, if the opponent has challenged the connection premise of an argument that clearly instances an adopted argumentation scheme, she must offer a counterconsideration that explains her criticism of the connection premise, if the proponent requests so.[14]

Thus, suppose From Expert Opinion is a *prima facie* acceptable scheme to the opponent, and the proponent has argued: "Weatherman Erwin says that it's going to rain, therefore it is going to rain", and the opponent nevertheless raises a connection criticism "Why would I accept that it's going to rain if weatherman Erwin says so?", then, she must offer, on request, a counterconsideration (which in this context is often called a *defeater*, cf. Pollock 1995), such as "Erwin might have been confused, or drunk, or maybe he was joking." (Again, connection criticism is different from scheme criticism, which would amount to a challenge to the *prima facie* acceptability of the general argumentation scheme: "Why would we accept some proposition of the say-so of some expert?") After discussing the various levels of specificity below in Sect. 6, I will propose a set of rules that implement The Binding Norm in such a manner that it accommodates normative requirements on the specificity of counterconsiderations.

At the lowest level of specificity, a *mere request* "Why P?", focused on a standpoint, or on a regular reason, or on a connection premise, not accompanied by

[14] This norm differs from that adopted by Walton et al. (2008), who hold that when the opponent raises a critical question, "Pose C," against a premise with the status of a presumption, the opponent must, upon request, offer argumentation in favour of the denial of that premise, "not-C," whereas in the view adopted here, the discussion should remain non-mixed if the opponent manages to criticize and explain her criticism in a cautious manner. See for a defence of the current position: (van Laar and Krabbe 2013).

any counterconsideration, provides no further indications to the proponent whatsoever about how to respond to it, and gives no clues as to what argumentation scheme should be used in order to convince the opponent, except conveying the most general advice to offer some argument or other. It is a most general request for argumentation, inciting the proponent to offer an argument, of whatever type, in favour of the proposition challenged.

At a somewhat higher level of specificity, a challenge dissuades the proponent from using some argumentation schemes, but still leaves open a range of other options. For example, the critical reaction "Why so? Says who?" makes it quite clear that the opponent does not request an argument from consequences, but rather an argument from expert opinion, or from a position to know, or possibly from popular opinion, that is, an argument that starts from the premise that one or more persons said something. With such a *moderately directive challenge*, the opponent attempts to direct the proponent to choose from one set of particular argumentation schemes rather than from another.[15]

At an even higher level of specificity, the counterconsideration makes it fully clear what kind of argumentation scheme might be convincing to the opponent, for example: "Why so? Is there an expert who vouches for it?" This might be labelled a *scheme bound challenge* (see Krabbe 2007, for the related notion of a bound challenge). The proponent, in such cases, is invited to apply an argumentation scheme From Expert Opinion to the case at hand. Thus, the move "Why so? Is there an expert who vouches for it?" conveys the counterconsideration "There is no expert who vouches for it," and the invited argument refutes it: "It is going to rain, because weatherman Erwin says so." (Note that a challenge might even be fully specific, by stating the very proposition to be refuted by the proponent: "Why so? As far as you have shown, weatherman Erwin hasn't made this forecast".)

Scheme bound challenges are highly specific, and provide the proponent with clear advice. However, at all lower levels of specificity, the challenges may not provide the proponent with sufficient information, and the proponent may want to request the opponent to specify her challenge, or to make her elaborate on a counterconsideration that has been presented earlier.[16] In particular contexts, quite unspecific counterconsiderations may generate lack of clarity, for example if the opponent means to express a specific request for an argument from expertise, but does so with an overly general formulation such as "Why so? Says who?", so that the proponent may come to misread it as a specific request for an argument from popularity. The resulting argument from popularity, "Because everybody says so!", might not satisfy the opponent's needs and remain non-persuasive to her. The proponent's choice of this argument, however, has not been the sole responsibility

[15] In pragma-dialectical terms, the opponent steers the proponent to make particular choices from the *topical potential* and to make him meet *audience demand* (Van Eemeren 2010, chapter 4). Consequently, the opponent tries to influence the proponent's *strategic manoeuvring*.

[16] Note that in the case of an unspecific challenge or of a moderately directive challenge, the opponent may express precisely what she intends to express, to wit a request for an argument of whatever type, or for an argument from a more delineated set of argument types. In that case, the counterconsideration may still be unclear to the proponent in the sense that he does not know in detail what kind of argument would remove the opponent's doubts.

of the proponent. Part of the responsibility might be traced to the opponent's choice to use an imprecise formulation of her challenge, that, to some degree, also pointed in the direction of the argumentation scheme From Popular Opinion.

Of course, a challenge at a low level of specificity can be perfectly appropriate, for the opponent may have no clue about what might convince her, and is simply curious about what strategy the proponent might come up with. Consequently, dialogue rules should balance between the desirability for highly informative counterconsiderations on the opponent's part, and leaving the discharge of the burden of proof and the creativity that this may require, to the proponent.

6 Rules for Dealing with Unspecific Requests for Argumentation

Here I propose six general rules that accommodate challenges at different levels of specificity, and I focus on situations where the opponent challenges a proposition that does not, at that early stage of the dialogue, have the status of a presumption, so that there is, as of yet, no obligation on the opponent's part to provide a counterconsideration, if requested.[17] How, in such a situation, can she be encouraged to take up her responsibility to motivate her critical stance, to a sufficient degree of specificity? The proposed rules show that it is feasible to develop a fairly reasonable normative system to this effect, without showing that this is the best possible way of implementing this idea.

The rules start from the following premises: (1) The opponent should be encouraged, but not obligated, to specify her criticism up to the level of scheme bound challenges; (2) A fair mechanism for implementing this is to consider the opponent to have *adopted* the argumentation scheme (if any) that underlies the proponent's argument in response to the opponent's challenge, if this challenge does not exclude that argumentation scheme, so that (in line with The Binding Norm) the argument's connection premise comes to count as a presumption on the opponent's part; (3) At no juncture does the opponent incur a genuine burden of proof by challenging a proposition or by explaining a mere challenge, at least not in the sense of incurring the obligation to offer an argument that starts from concessions made by the interlocutor. Instead, she is only concerned with discharging a burden of criticism, which pertains to providing explanations of her motives, or equivalent in this kind of context, strategic advice. Note that Rule 3, Rule 4, Rule 5, and Rule 6 implement The Binding Norm in such a way that it accommodates normative requirements on the level of specificity of counterconsiderations.

Rule 1. The proponent is allowed to request an explanation of any challenge that is not a scheme bound challenge.

[17] These rules form a normative proposal, motivated by the ideal of resolving differences of opinion based upon what the dialogue participants consider to be the merits of both sides. However, to the extent that these norms reflect the norms as they happen to be operative in argumentative conversations, these rules could be translatable into the correctness conditions that characterize the speech act with which to advance explanatory counterconsiderations.

Comment on Rule 1: Thus, the focus of such a request can be both a fully unspecific and a moderately directive challenge, but not a scheme bound challenge.

> *Rule 2*. In response to a request for an explanation of a fully unspecific challenge, "Why A?", the opponent is allowed to provide a counterconsideration that explains her challenge, which is more or less specific, but she also has the right to make a remark to the effect that she has no further explanation to offer, "No further explanation," if at least she has not challenged a proposition that counts as a presumption.

Comment on Rule 2: The "no further explanation" option is required, because we should not discourage people from adopting the role of the opponent in a discussion, when they are not sufficiently knowledgeable, or otherwise not geared to offer more informed criticisms.

> *Rule 3*. In response to a request for an explanation of a moderately directive challenge, "Explain(Why A? Counter C)?", the opponent is allowed to provide a counterconsideration, "Why A? Counter D?" either in such a way that the new counterconsideration, D, counts as more specific than the initial one, C,[18] or in such a way that the new counterconsideration, D, counts as a replacement of the initial one, C.[19] However, she also has a right to make a remark to the effect that she has no further explanation to offer, "No further explanation," if at least she has not challenged a proposition that counts as a presumption.[20]

Comment on Rules 1–3: The dialogue in Fig. 2 conforms to these first three rules: At the Stages 3 and 5, the proponent does not pretend to discharge his burden of proof, but invites clarification, or further clarification, of the opponent's critical stance, in preparation of a future discharge of his burden of proof. At Stage 4, the opponent specifies her initial challenge at Stage 2 ("Counter C" is substituted with "Says who?" to make the dialogue more suggestive of a real-life encounter). At Stage 6 she refuses to make her challenge scheme bound, for A is not a presumption within this dialogue).

> *Rule 4*. If the opponent challenges a proposition *A* with a pure challenge or with a moderatively directive challenge (in other words, not with a scheme bound challenge), if that request leaves the proponent with the option to apply a particular type of argumentation scheme S1, and if the proponent offers an argument that instances argumentation scheme S1, then the opponent is committed to the acceptability of argumentation scheme S1 and the

[18] For example, if the opponent first had explained her critical stance by advancing as a counterconsideration "Says who?," she might choose to specify her counterconsideration by means of "Says what expert?" (or she might specify "Erwin might not be well" by means of "Erwin might be drunk").

[19] For example, if the opponent first had explained her critical stance by advancing as a counterconsideration "Says who?," she might choose to replace it with the new counterconsideration "What are its consequences?" (or she might replace "Erwin might not be well" with "Erwin might be joking").

[20] I propose no further guidelines for what counts as a more specific counterconsideration or what counts as a replacement, and I simply assume that this is marked linguistically by the opponent.

1. Proponent:	A
2. Opponent:	Why A?
3. Proponent:	Explain (Why A?)
4. Opponent:	Why A? Says who?
5. Proponent:	Explain (Why A? Says who?)
6. Opponent:	No further explanation

Fig. 2 An illustration of Rules 1–3

connection premise of the argument offered becomes a presumption of the opponent.

Comment on Rule 4: Consequently, if the opponent challenges the connection premise of an argument that instances an argumentation scheme that has not been excluded by her earlier challenge, she incurs the obligation to explain her challenge of the connection premise, if so requested by the proponent.

Rule 5. If the opponent challenges a proposition *A* with a pure challenge or with a moderatively directive challenge (in other words, not with a scheme bound challenge), if that request leaves the proponent with the option to apply a particular type of argumentation scheme S1, if the proponent offers an argument that instances argumentation scheme S1, and the opponent nevertheless challenges the connection premise of the argument, the proponent may: (option a) request the opponent to explain her latest challenge (note: a challenge she must comply with, see Rule 4 and its comment); or he may (option b) request the opponent to make her earlier challenge of A scheme bound.

Comment on Rule 5: If the opponent challenges the connection premise of an argument that instances an argumentation scheme that has not been excluded by the opponent's initial challenge, the proponent may feel led astray and rather than an explanation of this connection criticism, he may want the opponent to provide a fully scheme bound challenge to A so that he is able to choose an argument that stands a chance of success. But then, alternatively, he may be satisfied with an explanation of the challenge of the connection premise (now counting as a presumption).

By including Rules 4 and 5 in a dialogue system, the opponent is encouraged to provide scheme bound challenges, for the reason that they bring less commitments (presumptions) than challenges that leave more options open to the proponent. In Fig. 3, the dialogue that branches to the right illustrates the use of the proponent's option a, whereas the dialogue that branches to the left illustrates the use of the proponent's option b.

1. Proponent:	A ("It's wise to accept this policy.")	
2. Opponent:	Why A?	
3. Proponent:	Expert Erwin says that A. Therefore A.	
4. Opponent:	Why (If Erwin says A then A)?	
5. Proponent:	Explain (Why A?)	Explain (Why if Erwin says A then A?)
6. Opponent:	Why A? What positive consequences would result from this policy?	Why (If Erwin says A then A)? Erwin might be biased.

Fig. 3 An illustration of Rules 4–5

1. Proponent:	A ("It's wise to accept this policy.")	
2. Opponent:	Why A? Says who?	
3. Proponent:	Accepting this policy has positive consequences. Therefore A.	
4. Opponent:	Why (A, if this policy has positive consequences)?	
5. Proponent:	Explain (Why A? Says who?)	Explain (Why A, if this policy has positive consequences?)
6. Opponent:	No further explanation	No further explanation

Fig. 4 An illustration of Rules 4–5

There is no rule that forces the proponent to choose from the set of argumentation schemes that the opponent left open in her critical reaction, because how he chooses to discharge his burden of proof should be left to his discretion. Nevertheless, the rules do give the proponent an incentive to be responsive to the opponent's demands. Suppose the opponent's challenge is scheme bound, or at least not fully unspecific, and clearly excludes, say, the argumentation scheme From Consequences: "Why A? Says what expert?" or "Why A? Says who?" Then, if the proponent offers an argument from consequences, this does not result in a presumption on the opponent's part to the connection premise of that argument. Nor does it lead to an obligation to be more specific about the initial challenge. (Note that the opponent may be committed to the argumentation scheme on separate grounds, such that the connection premise constitutes a presumption, after all.) Thus, in this situation, the opponent has a right but not an obligation to make her initial challenge more specific, if it was not scheme bound already, or to explain her challenge to the connection premise (see Fig. 4).

Consequently, criticism is never completely noncommittal, because the proponent has the means available to force the opponent either to make her challenge scheme bound, or to make her adopt his choice of an argumentation scheme.

1. Proponent:	A	
2. Opponent:	Why A? Is there an expert who vouches for A?	
3. Proponent:	This expert Erwin says that A. Therefore A.	
4. Opponent:	Why (If this expert Erwin says A, then A)?	*Why (If an expert says something, then that's the case)?*

Fig. 5 An illustration of Rule 6

> *Rule 6*. If the opponent makes an explicit request for an argument that instances a particular argumentation scheme, then that scheme becomes a fixed commitment by her.

Comment on Rule 6: A scheme bound challenge binds the opponent to adopt the argumentation scheme indicated. Thus, if an opponent explicitly requests an argument from expert opinion, the proponent may assume that the opponent holds the argumentation scheme From Expert Opinion to be acceptable and cannot raise scheme criticism against that scheme. Even so, she retains her right to raise a connection criticism, given that it is directed against the specific application of the general scheme to the case at hand (compare the distinction between appropriate schemes and correct applications of appropriate schemes, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004). In Fig. 5, the inadmissibility of a move is indicated by asterisks.

Is this set of rules too harsh on the opponent? After all, she has to accept argumentation schemes as prima facie acceptable that she does not clearly exclude as being requested for in her criticism. Nevertheless, I do not think so, because even when she offers a less than fully specific criticism, she does not incur any *fixed* commitment, or any real burden of *proof*. And she has the option to avoid unwelcome presumptive commitments by advancing more directive criticism. Finally, it serves a purpose: inciting the opponent to go beyond a lame, noncommittal and sceptical position.

7 Ambiguity

There is an overlap between criticism that lacks specificity, and criticism that is ambiguous, due to the fact that expressions that lack specificity often admit various readings. In an earlier paper I adopted the term "active ambiguity" from Arne Naess (1966), which refers to an expression as used in a particular dialogue context that has the following features: (1) it is *contextually ambiguous*, by linguistically allowing for more than one reading, even after having taken the contextual clues into account; (2) the ambiguity is *covert*, in the sense that the proponent does not make it clear that he intends the expression to be understood in more than one sense ("Mozart was *musical*, in every possible sense of that term"); and (3) the ambiguity is *interactionally relevant*, such that a participant's choosing, or starting from, one

reading rather than another has consequences for the course of the dialogue (van Laar 2010). Are there situations where active ambiguity within the proponent's argument can be traced back to the lack of specificity of the opponent's criticism?

An expression that is unspecific—for instance "someone"—need not be actively ambiguous at all, for the reason that the different specifications of the expression—for example: "some expert" and "some person in a position to know"—are not linguistically admissible readings within the context of the utterance, and/or for the reason that it is contextually clear that the speaker or writer intends to express an unspecific concept or thought that is adequately covered by the chosen expression—"some person" (see Naess 1966, for a discussion of the distinction between lack of specificity and ambiguity). The counterconsideration "Says who?", therefore, is most plausibly not ambiguous in most contexts, although it is not fully specific and may lead to a kind of uncertainty on the proponent's part.

However, unspecific expressions can in particular circumstances give rise to active or other kinds of ambiguities because two or more specifications of the expression also count as possible disambiguations. For example, the expression "one o'clock" is a general expression, and at face value it refers both to 1 p.m. and 1 a.m. but, within more specific contexts, for example conversations about university timetables, it can be used unambiguously to refer to 1 p.m., and in other conversations, about meeting after a dinner party for example, to 1 a.m. Consequently, such an expression admits an unspecific reading as well as two (or more) specific readings. Thus, it is not difficult to imagine contexts where it admits of more than one reading, which leaves it open to the listener to interpret the speaker, or where the listener misunderstands what the speaker intended to express, for example: "I will arrive at the train station at 1."

Here, I will use one of Hamblin's examples of equivocation: "All acts prescribed by law are obligatory. Non-performance of an obligatory act is to be condemned. So, non-performance of an act prescribed by law is to be condemned" (1970). The opponent may want to resist the conclusion (taking "condemned" in a moral sense) on the ground that she distinguishes between a legal and a moral sense of the expression "obligatory." Given the two occurrences of this term in the reasoning, there are four possible disambiguations of the reasoning, none of which generates an argument that has two acceptable premises as well as an acceptable connection premise. Hamblin (1970) explains that it is not possible to devise dialectical systems with rules that exclude this kind of equivocal reasoning, for the participants may, in the case of such *subtle* equivocations, disagree on whether an expression is ambiguous, whereas we lack access to a neutral decision procedure with which to evaluate the issue. In the example above, the proponent may contend that there is no distinction between moral and legal norms. Hamblin's conclusion is that dialogue systems should be extended with *points of order*, with which the participants can talk *about* their dialogue, and monitor its course, rather than attempting to devise rules that ban equivocation generating expressions. Hamblin's student, Mackenzie, elaborated on this idea by developing a dialogue system that enables a participant to initiate this kind of meta-dialogue, by saying something to the effect of "Distinguo! I make a distinction between a moral and a legal sense of the expression *obligatory*." In this way, the participants improve upon their own language by

introducing more precise expressions if the need for more precision arises (Mackenzie 1988). Unlike Mackenzie, who allows the critic to disambiguate the interlocutor's reasoning, I would propose extending a basic critical discussion in such a way that it is up to the opponent to charge the proponent with equivocation, and up to the proponent to repair this flaw by choosing a disambiguation (van Laar 2010).

In line with other scholars (see Walton 1996, chapter 2), Mackenzie conceives of the fallacy of equivocation as a problem on the arguer's (proponent's) part. However, given the overlap between lack of specificity and ambiguity, as well as the connections between criticism and argumentation, there is some room for doubt. It seems plausible that in at least some situations, the proponent's equivocal argument can be partly blamed on the opponent, on account of an unspecific as well as ambiguous counterconsideration. Take the example where a proponent airs his opinion that "Non-performance of an act prescribed by law is to be condemned," and that the opponent challenges it by saying "Why so? Is the performance of an act prescribed by law a matter of obligation?" The opponent, at this point, might not have something very specific in mind when choosing the term "obligation": She may be thinking of duties in general, whether generated by a national law or a moral law. Then the proponent is invited to offer an argument along the lines of "Because all acts prescribed by law are obligatory, and non-performance of an obligatory act is to be condemned" (an instance of an argumentation scheme From Rules, see Walton et al. 2008, pp. 343–344). Now, if the opponent justly points out the active ambiguity in the expression "obligatory," possibly because she came to understand that a distinction between national and moral law is pertinent, it seems reasonable if the proponent retorts by saying something to the effect that it is the opponent who is responsible for introducing this ambiguous expression, and that she should first disambiguate her counterconsideration, at least before the proponent proceeds by disambiguating his argumentation. Consequently, it is quite plausible that in some situations, the opponent is partly responsible for a fallacy of ambiguity by the proponent, for the reason that the ambiguity can be traced back to one of the opponent's counterconsiderations, which was not only unspecific but also, retrospectively, actively ambiguous.

To buttress my hypothesis that less than fully specific counterconsiderations can easily be actively ambiguous, I will elaborate on a different example. Suppose, the proponent states his opinion that we should keep spending 0.7 % of our gross national product on development aid, and that the opponent challenges it in a quite, but not fully specific way, by saying "Why so? As far as you've shown, this policy's positive consequences might not outweigh its negative consequences." The opponent, then, clearly requests for an argument from consequences. However, the proponent might make a distinction between two kinds of consequences, and consequently between an argumentation scheme From Consequences *In The Light Of A Common Good*, and an argumentation scheme From Consequences *In The Light Of A Private Or At Least A Partisan Interest*. The opponent's counterconsideration is unspecific in leaving both options open, yet also contextually ambiguous by allowing two distinct readings within the context of utterance, that is: a request for an argument from consequences in the light of a common good, and a request for an argument from consequences in the

light of a private or at least a partisan interest. The ambiguity is interactionally relevant, for if the proponent wrongly interprets the request for argumentation as a request for an argument from consequences in light of a private or a partisan interest, and offers an argument along the lines of "Because then we will accept your proposal to reduce expenses on welfare," the result will be a kind of negotiation dialogue. Whereas, if he would have extracted the intended request for an argument from consequences in light of a common good, he might have given an argument along the lines of "because we have a duty to support the poor," and the result would have been the kind of persuasion dialogue that the opponent wanted to engage in. Therefore, as soon as the confusion comes to light, the opponent should specify, and thereby disambiguate her challenge.

8 Conclusion

It furthers the dialectic when the opponent is clear about what motivates and underlies her critical stance, even if she does not adopt an opposite standpoint, but merely doubts the proponent's opinion. When having challenged a proposition that counts as a presumption, there should be an obligation on the opponent's part to provide an explanatory counterconsideration, if requested by the proponent. In other situations there is no real dialectical obligation, but a mere responsibility for the opponent to cooperate by providing her motivations for being critical. In this paper, it has been shown how a set of dialogue rules may encourage an opponent, in this latter type of situation, to provide her counterconsiderations, and to do so at an appropriate level of specificity. The proposed rules strike a balance between on the one hand encouraging the opponent to make her criticism as directive, informative and specific as possible, and on the other enabling her to examine and discuss topics that are outside her field of expertise. The idea has been that the opponent may, initially, raise highly unspecific criticisms, but that the proponent should have the means available for inciting the opponent to choose between becoming ever more specific about her critical position, until her challenges become scheme bound, and accepting the *kind* of argumentation that he uses, and the commitments that this involves regarding the argument's connection premise (now counting as a presumption). Finally, it has become clear that unspecific criticism overlaps with ambiguity in criticism. How rules for dealing with ambiguity and rules for dealing with lack of specificity in criticism should be combined in a dialogue system is an open issue to be left for a future occasion.

Acknowledgments I am extremely grateful for the many useful suggestions and comments by the anonymous reviewers of this journal. I would also like to thank Erik Krabbe for his comments on an earlier version of this paper.

References

Finocchiaro, Maurice A. 1980. *Galileo and the art of reasoning: Rhetorical foundations of logic and scientific method*. Dordrecht: Reidel. (Boston studies in the philosophy of science 61).

Finocchiaro, Maurice A. 2005. *Arguments about arguments: Systematic, critical, and historical essays in logical theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hamblin, Charles L. (1970). *Fallacies*. London: Methuen. Reprinted with a preface by John Plecnik & John Hoaglund in 1986, Newport News, VA: Vale Press.

Krabbe, Erik C.W. 2001. The problem of retraction in critical discussion. *Synthese: An International Journal for Epistemology, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* 127: 141–159.

Krabbe, Erik C.W. 2003. Metadialogues. In *Proceedings of the fifth international conference of the International Society for the study of argumentation*, eds. Frans H. van Eemeren, J. Anthony Blair, Charles A. Willard, and A. Francisca Snoeck Henkemans (University of Amsterdam, June 26–28, 2002), Amsterdam: Sic Sat, International Centre for the Study of Argumentation, 641–644.

Krabbe, Erik C.W. 2007. Nothing but objections! In *Reason Reclaimed: Essays in Honor of J. Anthony Blair and Ralph H. Johnson* eds. Hans V. Hansen and Robert C. Pinto (pp. 51–63, references pp. 283–299), Newport News, VA: Vale Press.

Krabbe, Erik C. W., and van Laar, Jan Albert (2011). The ways of criticism. *Argumentation* 25: 199-227.

Mackenzie, Jim. 1988. Distinguo: The response to equivocation. *Argumentation* 2: 465–482.

Naess, Arne. 1966. *Communication and argument: Elements of applied semantics*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Pollock, John. 1995. *Cognitive carpentry: A blueprint for how to build a person*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Rescher, Nicholas. 1977. *Dialectics: A controversy-oriented approach to the theory of knowledge*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Rescorla, Michael. 2009. Shifting the burden of proof? *The Philosophical Quarterly* 59: 86–109.

Searle, John R. 1979. *Expression and meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

van Eemeren, Frans H. 2010. *Strategic maneuvering in argumentative discourse: Extending the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

van Eemeren, Frans H., and Rob Grootendorst. 2004. *A systematic theory of argumentation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

van Eemeren, Frans H., and Peter Houtlosser. 2005. Theoretical construction and argumentative reality: An analytical model of critical discussion and conventionalised types of argumentative activity. In *The uses of argument: Proceedings of a conference at McMaster University*, ed. David Hitchcock, 75–84. Hamilton: Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation.

van Laar, Jan Albert. 2007. One-sided arguments. *Synthese* 154: 307–327.

van Laar, Jan Albert. 2010. Ambiguity in argument. *Argument & Computation* 1: 125–146.

van Laar, Jan Albert. 2011. Argumentation schemes from Hamblin's dialectical perspective. *Informal Logic* 31: 344–366.

van Laar, Jan Albert. 2012. Logical criticism and argumentation schemes: Argument from expert opinion as a case in point. In *Inside Arguments: Logic and the Study of Argumentation*, ed. Henrique Jales Ribeiro, 189–205. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

van Laar, Jan Albert., and Erik C. W. Krabbe. 2013. The burden of criticism: Consequences of taking a critical stance. *Argumentation* 27: 201–224.

Walton, Doug N., and Erik C.W. Krabbe. 1995. *Commitment in dialogue: Basic concepts of interpersonal reasoning*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.

Walton, Doug N. 1996. *Fallacies arising from ambiguity*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Walton, Doug N., Chris Reed, and Fabrizio Macagno. 2008. *Argumentation schemes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.